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FAREWELL SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH-CHURCH OF ST. MARTIN,

BIRMINGHAM,

On SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1789.

By JOHN CLUTTON, M. A.

RECTOR OF KINNERSLEY, HEREFORDSHIRE; LATE LECTURER
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TO THE
 PARISHIONERS OF ST. MARTIN'S,
 AND
 Other Inhabitants of the Town
 OF
 BIRMINGHAM,
 HIS MUCH-ESTEEMED FRIENDS,
 THE AUTHOR

INSCRIBES, WITH SENTIMENTS OF RESPECT,

THE FOLLOWING

S E R M O N;

which has no pretensions to their approbation, except as an instance of his zealous anxiety for their welfare. The solicitations of friends, however numerous and respectable, who have expressed a wish to read what they have heard, would avail but little towards deprecating that critical judgment, which is *not* influenced by partiality. Prompted to

publish by better motives, the author prefers a better plea.---The opinion of some, whose favourable opinion is both an encouragement and an *honour*, authorises him to indulge the flattering idea, that this Discourse in its published state may continue to promote those ends for which it was preached. Should it prove in the least conducive to the sacred interests of RELIGION, and the particular edification of his late CHARGE; neither the sceptic's opinion, nor the caviller's animadversions will at all discompose his satisfaction. To the candid attention of an indulgent people, and above all, to the blessing of the DIVINE DISPOSER of human affairs, he commits it, with a mind humbly, yet firmly convinced, that even *St. Paul* would have *planted*, and *Apollos* would have *watered* in vain, if GOD had not deigned to give the *increase**.

* 1 Cor. iii. 6.

A FAREWELL SERMON.

ACTS xx. 32.

—AND NOW, BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD, AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.

SUCH was the apostolical leave which St. Paul took of his Ephesian converts.

This holy ambassador of God, being *bound in the spirit*, that is, determined in his mind to go to Jerusalem, though assured that bonds and afflictions awaited him, had called together the church of Ephesus, the metropolis of Asia. To this respectable assembly he declares his intention of departing; reminds them of the manner in which he had exercised his ministry amongst them, and the doctrines which he had principally insisted on in his discourses; finally, since he must leave them, leaves them to the care of a merciful Providence; and for their better edification and eternal welfare, recommends them to the sacred truths and precepts of the gospel.

But no account of his behaviour on this occasion can be better than what is related in his own words; which, as they are the genuine effusions of a benevolent heart delivered in the language of sincere affection, I cannot resist the pleasure of reciting.—“ Ye
 “ know,” said the apostle to the Ephesians,
 “ from the first day that I came into Asia,
 “ after what manner I have been with you
 “ at all seasons, serving the Lord with all hu-
 “ mility of mind; and how I kept back no-
 “ thing that was profitable unto you; but have
 “ shewed you, and taught you publicly, and
 “ from house to house; testifying both to
 “ the Jews and also to the Greeks REPEN-
 “ TANCE toward God, and FAITH toward
 “ our Lord Jesus Christ. And now, behold,
 “ I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not
 “ knowing the things that shall befall me;
 “ save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in
 “ every city, saying that bonds and afflic-
 “ tions abide me. But none of these things
 “ move me, neither count I my life dear unto
 “ myself, so that I might finish my course
 “ with joy, and the ministry which I have
 “ received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the
 “ gospel of the grace of God. And now,
 “ behold, I know that ye all among whom I
 “ have

“ have gone preaching the kingdom of God,
 “ shall see my face no more. Wherefore I
 “ take you to record this day, that I am pure
 “ from the blood of all men. For, I have not
 “ shunned to declare unto you all the counsel
 “ of God. Remember, that by the space of
 “ three years I ceased not to warn every one
 “ night and day with tears. *And now, brethren*
 “ *I commend you to God, and to the word of his*
 “ *grace, which is able to build you up, and to give*
 “ *you an inheritance among all them which are*
 “ *sanctified.*”

Thus related the Apostle his manner of dis-
 charging the ministerial function. He re-
 lated it, not to raise himself in the esteem of
 his hearers, but to awaken and fix in their
 minds the important instructions he had given
 them. And, since it was his heavenly Mas-
 ter's will to call him away, he commended
 them to the care of HIM, who could abun-
 dantly supply his absence, and to *the word of*
his grace, the express revelation of his will,
 the GOSPEL, sufficiently able to edify and im-
 prove their souls in all virtue and christian
 graces, and upon their due performance of its
 conditions, to give them a title to an immortal
 and blessed *inheritance* in communion with all
 the holy disciples of Christ.

The words of my text thus introduced and illustrated may furnish matter of inquiry,

I. Why the apostle at his departure commends his valuable charge to the particular care of God.

II. Why he commends them to the WORD OF HIS GRACE, OR THE GOSPEL.

These inquiries resolved, I shall address to you

III. A recapitulation of some doctrines and precepts, which I would fain leave impressed upon your minds with all the weight and influence that should accompany the last words of a departing friend. The

I. Subject of inquiry is, why did the holy pastor commend his flock to the PECULIAR CARE OF ALMIGHTY GOD?

To whom else, it may be asked in reply, could he with confidence give them in trust, but to that Divine Power which created and preserved them, and had provided the best means for their future welfare? The all-wise Dispenser of good and evil, was the only Being that could make the incidents of life

conducive to their benefit;—the only Power, that could save or support them under the pressure of calamity. For surely the apostle knew their defenceless state. Doubtless he foresaw, that tribulation and persecution would arise to them because of the faith.—He foresaw the malice and temptations of the world, the wiles of Satan, and their own carnal frailness; all ready to conspire, and to choke the good seeds of christianity, which he had sedulously sown in their hearts. But great and manifold as these impending dangers were, he knew to *whom* he was committing the holy charge, and that HE would keep it unimpaired against the last day. When he, their spiritual father, was obliged to forsake his children, the Lord, he knew, would take them up, and adopt them for his own.---He was satisfied that no harm could befall them, when entrusted to *the living God, the Saviour of all men, especially of them that believe.* To advance more reasons for his commending them to God, would be injurious to your religious convictions; to have said less upon this head would not have done justice to my text. The

II. Inquiry to be investigated is, why the Ephesians are commended not *only to God*,
but

but also to the GOSPEL, that WORD OF DIVINE GRACE.

Their present instructor was now on the point of leaving them without any inspired successor. But, could he have left them to the care of an apostle as well qualified as himself; the age of immediate inspiration would shortly expire.—Soon must every heaven-instructed teacher pay the universal debt of nature. No living guide, who could pretend to know the mind of God, would then be found to shew inquiring christians the paths of truth and virtue, and caution them against the mazes of error and vice. Yet, hopeless as their condition was, a provision competent to their wants was made by Divine Mercy. The good tidings of salvation were not to die away with the breath which uttered them.---They were preserved by faithful historians, the very witnesses of what they recorded under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, and secured to future ages by infinite wisdom and power. So that their writings could declare the doctrines and precepts of christianity, when the hands which penned them were lifeless, and the tongues which preached them mute in the silent grave.

To

To this treasure of sacred knowledge the departing teacher commends his hearers, now that they can no longer receive his oral instructions.-----He commends them to the WORD OF GOD'S GRACE, as being ABLE TO BUILD THEM UP.

Already was the foundation of the christian religion laid in their hearts by this wise *master-builder*; and now he leaves the superstructure under Divine blessing to be finished with those instruments of all perfection, the *scriptures*. These he recommends to supply his place, to preserve the remembrance of his admonitions, and to fill up the measure of their religious knowledge.

“ Search the scriptures,” is a charge given by the Lord himself; and the same direction is repeatedly inculcated, and earnestly enforced by the apostles. St. Paul tells it for the credit of Timothy, and as the reason of his steadfastness in the faith, that “ from a child he had “ known the scriptures*.” And to encourage him to keep up his knowledge of them, he gives them the character of being “ able to “ make him wise unto salvation through “ faith in Christ Jesus.”

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

To the great dearth of scriptural knowledge did the primitive fathers impute the many divisions which disturbed the peace of the world; and to the same lamented evil, may be imputed those erroneous opinions and tenets of the present age, which break the bonds of peace and charity asunder, and undermine the foundation, on which the virtue and happiness of life depend. Had the last generation been better instructed, and were the present more conversant, in “the principles of the oracles of God,” we should not have to lament that licentiousness both of thinking and acting, which now derides the doctrines, and breaks the laws, of religion. For, “all scripture, which is *given by inspiration of God*, is profitable for DOCTRINE, for REPROOF, for CORRECTION, for INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS*.”

Not a want can arise to the human mind, that may not be here supplied. Doth it desire to know what God has deigned to reveal; to be informed of his attributes and his works; to learn his dealings with us, his intentions towards us, and his will concerning us? Lead it to the *word of God*. “In that are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge†.”

* 2 Tim. iii. 16.

† Col. ii. 3.

There

There it may *glean* some notions though inadequate of the “breadth and length, of the height and depth, of the love of God*.” there it may be instructed in all things pertaining to *peace and salvation*.

Doth zeal for God’s honour and the cause of his religion inflame the heart? And is the “righteous soul vexed at seeing *the unlawful deeds of the sinner*, and hearing *the blasphemous speeches of the infidel*†?” The word of God is profitable for REPROOF, and for CORRECTION. It charges them who have the oversight “to reprove and rebuke all such, as in belief or practise resist the truth, and turn away their ears from sound doctrine‡.” It teaches us to *correct* by repentance, and to *amend* whatever “we have done amiss.”

Doth the christian mind hunger and thirst after RIGHTEOUSNESS? “Blessed disposition! It shall be filled ||,” saith our SAVIOUR. Wisdom crieth aloud; she offereth the lessons of righteousness in the chief places of concourse; she inviteth men of all descrip-

* Eph. iii. 18.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 2.

† 2 Peter ii. 8.

|| Matt. v. 6.

tions,

tions, even the poorest and the meanest, to come and receive instruction. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he, that hath no money, come, buy and eat*." In short, whatever can be wanting to attain knowledge; whatever, to improve practice, is amply provided in the WORD OF GRACE, which is able to make the servants of God "perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works†;" and thus, through the merits of CHRIST, secure of AN INHERITANCE AMONG THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED.

The advantages of godliness extend beyond the grave. Every true believer's hopes are full of *immortality*. He has a promise, not only of the life which now is, but also of that which is to come. When the current of time has flowed smoothly away in streams of beneficence, or at least benevolence; what joy, to meet with it again swelled into rivers of heavenly pleasures, flowing, and to flow for ever in the Divine presence! After a few years, passed in doing all possible good, or avoiding every sin that could be committed, ending in conscious delight, or at least negative satisfaction: or (to state the worst of mortality) after a few years

* Isaiah lv. 1.

† 2 Tim. iii. 17.

of calamity, of sickness, pain, poverty and wretchedness on this stage of vicissitudes, to find the scene shifted; to behold sorrow and misery flying away, and the REDEEMER appearing to wipe away tears from every eye, and to give his disciples this gracious invitation: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you:"--- Who, that considers this, does not aspire; what Christian is not ambitious, to make good his title to such an INHERITANCE AMONG THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED? In the

III. Place, my brethren, suffer me to recall to your minds some of those essential doctrines and precepts, which I have delivered from this pulpit in the course of my ministry among you.

The relation, in which I have served you for the space of six years, now expires. These are the last words, that I shall address to you in the capacity of *your minister*. Perhaps, this is the last time, that I am ever to see you thus assembled. Once more, then, indulge me with the attention ye have been ever wont to show me, while I recount the most important of those sacred truths, which
I drew

I drew for your edification from the WORD OF GRACE, and now would leave more deeply impressed upon your hearts.

In humble imitation of the apostolic model, I have *testified* in particular REPENTANCE towards GOD, and FAITH towards our LORD JESUS CHRIST. For, these doctrines I regard as the only solid ground of the christian religion ; the basis, on which alone mankind are to be “built up” to every virtue and grace. “REPENT AND BELIEVE*,” was the command of our SAVIOUR. “REPENT “AND BELIEVE,” was the repeated admonition of every one of his apostles. Other foundation than this can no minister lay; if he take pains to speak as the oracles of God; if he have any sense of his duty, any zeal for the welfare of his people.

Particular circumstances have impelled me to excite frequent reflection upon the great MYSTERIES OF OUR FAITH, and to compare the articles we profess to believe with the words of Divine Revelation. When infidelity had spread her banners aloft, had used every art to decoy unwary christians into her

* Mark i. 15.

lifts, and stir them up to war against their lawful PRINCE, that she might plunder him of his natural rights and ancient honours, should the appointed *watchman* betray his trust, and neglect to “sound the trumpet of “alarm?” Could any professed soldier of CHRIST meanly desert his post, abandon the “Captain of his salvation,” and forfeit the inestimable promises of the gospel? *For him who fighteth the good fight of faith, there is laid up a crown of righteousness in heaven**. “To “him that overcometh,” saith the Lord, “will I grant to sit with me on my throne†.” “Contend ye,” says an apostle, “contend ye “earnestly for the faith, which was once delivered to the saints; in nothing terrified by “your adversaries‡.”

Urged by the force of these promises and commands, by the necessity of the times, and by the solemn promises, with which I entered the priesthood, I have been ready on every suitable occasion to bear testimony against tenets, which were erroneous and contrary to God’s word, and to inculcate the

* 2 Tim. iv. 8.

† Rev. iii. 21.

‡ Jude iii.

§ See the *Form and Manner of ordering Priests*.

doctrines of *truth and soberness*, firmly believing them myself.

For similar reasons and with similar views I entered upon and nearly finished a systematical course of lectures on the *Church-catechism*. These I did not hesitate to bring before you on the presumption, that my subject is the best epitome of christian faith and morals, and furnishes materials for every kind of doctrinal and practical instruction. Before I could complete this undertaking, it pleased Providence to visit me with sickness, and thereupon to arrest and put an end to my labours here. Had the blessing of health been continued to me, I should have thought myself bound to finish those lectures, and offer them to you in a different manner, and more finished state, as a tribute of respect, a memorial of *that relation*, which has subsisted between us.

It was with great reluctance on my part, that this relation was dissolved. The ties of nature, of friendship and of long acquaintance had so strongly attached me to this place, that I could "gladly be spent in your service." But since the way of man is not in himself;

himself; since "it is not in man that walketh
 " to direct his steps," I must acquiesce in the
 ways of Providence, and content myself with
 wishing and praying for your welfare.

Through the whole course of my endeavours here begun at an early period of my ministry, I have continually felt, how much I stood in need of your candour, and how much I experienced it. To express my sentiments in the words of an ancient *Bishop of Antioch** to a *Roman Emperor*: "It has been most conspicuous, that without any regard had to
 " to the unworthiness of the *minister*, you
 " greatly respected in him the power of his
 " *Master*." In great weakness and imperfection was I with you; but this I can say with truth "in godly sincerity and fervent zeal I
 " preached the gospel." I say not with the apostle, that I have declared to you "*all the*
 " counsel of God," but this I will say; "I
 " have not *kept back any thing*, I thought profitable unto you." My *well-intended*, however executed, labours you accepted with kindness, and rewarded with generosity beyond my expectations.

* Flavian to Theodos. in Chrysost. Hom.

Allow me to hope, that you will extend the like, or greater, encouragement to him, who succeeds me in the duty and burden of this office. I beseech you, brethren, as a proof of your sincerity in religion, go on to "esteem your ministers very highly in love for their works sake," for your own sake, for the sake of CHRIST, whose ambassadors they are. St. Paul enjoins more than we ask: "Obey *," says he, "obey them, that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account; that they may do it with joy and not with grief." "Wherefore, beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION with fear and trembling."

Above all the perishable riches, all the fleeting pleasures of this world, choose and attend to with the greatest concern, the *one thing needful*, THE CARE OF YOUR IMMORTAL SOULS. To this end, be it your constant care to "have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men." And be not only negatively good, but prac-

* Heb. xiii. 17.

tice the duties of piety and charity, flowing from a grateful and an honest heart.

Worship GOD THE FATHER in spirit and in truth.---Hallow his sabbaths.---Reverence and frequent his sanctuary, and his altar.---Honour his holy name and his word; and serve him truly all the days of your lives.

And, as ye have received the Lord JESUS, GOD THE SON, “so walk ye in him, not beguiled of your reward by any man’s enticing words, but grounded and settled in the faith.” Believe the plain declaration of his infinite nature, however mysterious to finite reason, as ye find it in the word of God, in preference to the traditions or writings of fallible men*. Be firmly persuaded of his existence from all eternity, of his boundless power, wisdom and goodness, of his equality with the FATHER “as touching his GODHEAD.” Behave yourselves towards him, not like his doubting, but like his *believing* disciples, who WORSHIP-

* No disparagement is here intended to *the argument from tradition*, which has been so ably maintained in the learned and judicious writings of DR. HORSLEY; to whom the Church of England principally owes the defeat of her Socinian adversaries.

PED HIM*, while he was with them *in the world*†, and *after he was carried up into heaven*‡. For, as his most beloved disciples, who must be allowed to have known him best, and who wrote on purpose to confirm the faith and constancy of christian professors, expressly declares, “THIS IS THE TRUE GOD AND ETERNAL LIFE.” Be assured then, that “this is the truth of the gospel, the truth of the earliest ages of the primitive faith||.”

*To the like pious conduct in the primitive christians, *Tertullian* bears honourable testimony. He mentions, that *Pliny the Second* informed the *Emperor Trajan*, that “with hymns they celebrated CHRIST as GOD.”

APOL. C. ii.

See also Bishop Bull’s catalogue of the earliest writers, who maintained the *Divinity* of our *Saviour*.

JUDIC. ECCLES. CATH. C. i.

Another testimony to the same orthodox purport may be found in *LUCIAN*; who being not a professed ecclesiastical historian, but a witty Pagan writer, cannot in this case be charged with design. The “christians,” he observes with unusual seriousness, “abjure the gods of the Grecians; but ADORE *their crucified Teacher*. “They conform their lives to his laws, and are constant in their faith. To this day,” he repeats, “they worship their GREAT MAN *crucified in Palestine*.”

DE MORTE PEREGRINI.

† Matt. xx. 20. and xxviii 9. 17.

‡ Luke xxiv. 51, 52.

§ 1 John v. 20.

|| See the Rev. S. Badcock’s Letters, in the Gentleman’s Magazine of September.

If

If christians indeed, ye will also receive the SPIRIT OF GOD and OF CHRIST. Ye will do nothing to grieve the HOLY GHOST, nor frustrate the Divine Grace: but will fervently pray for, and co-operate with his influences on your souls, to carry them spotless through the regions of frail mortality to mansions of purity and eternal bliss, the promised *inheritance of all them, which are* SANCTIFIED.

From such faith and piety towards the holy TRINITY, may reasonably be expected the practice of all religious and social duties to MANKIND. While ye hold fast, as I trust ye will, the profession of your faith without wavering; while ye are steadfast in your attachment to that church*, which a learned wri-

* One of the most illustrious English Prelates of the seventeenth century, has cautioned us against separation, in this animated address: " Compare the church
" of England with any church in christendom, that of
" *Geneva*, for instance. Lo, there a common harbour
" of all opinions, if not a mixture! But, here you
" draw in the clear and free air of the Gospel, without
" the odious composition of *Judaism, Arianism, Socinianism, Anabaptism*. There you must live in the stench
" of these and more. You are unworthy of pity, if you
" will choose and approve such misery. Say, if you
" can, that the CHURCH OF ENGLAND (if she were not
" yours) is not a HEAVEN to *Amsterdam*.

HALL'S EPIST. DECAD. III.

ter

ter* declares to be “founded upon scripture, reason, the practice of the apostles, “and antiquity;” still like your Saviour, have compassion upon them that are out of the way. Judge charitably of men, whose persuasion is different; and rather lament, than condemn, their blindness, who see not, so clearly as yourselves, those beams of heavenly light, which issue from the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and sooner or later will enlighten them, who sit in darkness. As much as in you lies, live peaceably with all men, even with them, who are ENEMIES UNTO PEACE†. If ye are (as christians ye

* Hooker.

† Were I, as a *preacher* of THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, called upon to admonish such as foment divisions, and disturb the public peace by unscriptural tenets and licentious principles, I would address myself to their leader in terms like these. “Alas! that a pretender to wisdom should not know the worth of peace! *Son of Socinus*, or, whoever thou art!—what mean these novelties? Is singularity so precious, that it should cost no less than the safety and quiet of the church? If it be truth thou affectest; what, alone?—Could never any eyes, but thine, be blessed with the object?—Hath the gospel shone thus long and bright, and left some corners unseen? Away with all new tenets: fair and plausible they may be; sound they cannot.—Some may admire thee for them: none shall bless thee. Why must these unseasonable crotchets and quavers trouble the harmonious plain songs of our peace? —By the dear name of our common parents, what meanest thou?—Whither tend these *fomented* divisions?”

should be) “ filled with the spirit of God,” ye will on every occasion and at every juncture, bring forth the fruits of the spirit; which are, “ love, joy and peace, long-suffering, gentleness and meekness, temperance, “ faith and a good conscience.”

In these and every other grace, that can adorn and dignify the christian temper, may ye, my friends, “ abound more and more, “ till ye all come in the unity of the faith, “ and of the knowledge of the SON OF GOD “ unto a perfect man*, unto the measure, of “ the stature of the fulness of CHRIST,” and finally be received into those heavenly mansions prepared for his faithful disciples!

AND NOW, BRETHREN, I COMMEND YOU TO GOD AND TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE, WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP, AND TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE AMONG ALL THEM, WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED!

“ fions? By that most precious ransom of our SAVI-
“ OUR, and by that awful appearance, we shall one day
“ make before the tribunal of the SON OF GOD, re-
“ member thyself, and *trouble not* the Church of Christ.
“ Let not those talents, with which God has furnished
“ thee, lie in the narrow way, and cause any weak one
“ to fall, to stumble, or to err.”

HALL'S EPIST. DECAD 6.

* Ephes. iv. 13.

F I N I S.

should be) "filled with the Spirit of God,
we will on every occasion and at every time
sing, bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,
which are, "love, joy, peace, long-suffer-
ing, gentleness, meekness, temperance."
"Faith and a good conscience."
In these and every other grace, that can
adorn and dignify the Christian temper, may
we say, "abound yours and mine."
"All ye all come in the unity of the Spirit,
and of the knowledge of the Son of God,
and of the Father, who is the Father of
the Father of the Father of Christ."
and finally be received into those heavenly
regions prepared for his faithful disciples.

And now, brethren, I commend
you to God and to the word of His
Grace, which is able to build you
up, and to give you an inheritance
among the saints, which is incorruptible
and unchangeable.

"For I have not written to you as I have
written to many, with ink and pen,
but with the Spirit, with wisdom, and
with knowledge, that ye may know
the things which are of God, and
that ye may be able to give answer
to them that would accuse you in
the day of Christ."

THE END